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Discretionary Spending Will Increase Under Republican Plans

What “Cuts,” Mister President?

President Clinton claims that a less-than-one-percent-across-the-board reduction to the planned overall spending increases for FY 2000 is a cut in spending. That is simply not true. Under the final versions of the 13 appropriations bills, which comprise all of the government's discretionary spending accounts, *discretionary spending would go up 2 percent* as measured by outlays — and that includes the 0.97-percent-across-the-board restraint to avoid using any of the Social Security surplus.

Yes, that's right — the 13 conference reports amount to an increase of 2 percent from last year even after imposing this across-the-board reduction in growth to avoid using any Social Security receipts. And yes, the President's wrong. . . again.

Outlays 2 Percent *Higher*

While President Clinton may wish to ignore them, here's where the numbers stand. Under the now-completed 13 appropriations conference reports, overall discretionary spending outlays (including emergencies) amount to \$594.7 billion. That is over the \$579.9 billion outlay level from 1999. It also is \$3.5 billion over the level necessary to protect every dollar of the Social Security surplus.

Congress is committed to avoiding spending a single cent of the Social Security surplus. So, something must be done to offset the \$3.5 billion overage. The Administration has proven useless in this exercise, offering no genuine offsets, and instead making more spending demands. Yet, the President, too, claims he still wants to protect the Social Security surplus (although his own budget did not — spending \$29 billion from it over three years, according to the Congressional Budget Office). That leaves Congress to act unilaterally if the Social Security surplus is to be protected. The fairest way to slow the increase in spending is by imposing an infinitesimally small 0.59 percent reduction in the planned amount of spending (a commensurate 0.97-percent reduction in budget authority).

- The \$594.7 billion in total outlays would be reduced by the \$3.5 billion necessary to avoid touching Social Security. That is just 0.59 percent less in outlays and 0.97 percent less in budget authority from the amount intended to be spent.

- The resulting \$591.2 billion level of total discretionary outlays is still 1.9 percent above last year's \$579.9 billion level, and 2.2 percent over this year's \$578.7 billion discretionary cap level — which the Administration agreed to in 1997.
- The bottom line: Spending is still going up, but at a slower rate — i.e., there is no cut.

Individual Bills versus Last Year's Levels

The reduction in planned spending does not explain the Administration's obstinacy over refusing to allow the annual appropriations process to be completed. While overall funding levels have increased 2 percent, some individual areas have been reduced. Yet to date, President Clinton has not refused to sign bills for this reason.

Four of this year's appropriations bills have been lower in outlays and six lower in budget authority than last year's levels. Yet this has not automatically deterred President Clinton from signing them. Of the four bills below last year's outlay levels, President Clinton has already signed two (Military Construction and Energy and Water). Of the six bills below last year's budget authority levels, President Clinton has already signed four (Military Construction, Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Transportation). The converse is also true: three of the five bills that Clinton has not signed (Commerce-Justice-State, Interior, and Labor/HHS) are above last year's funding levels.

Thus, despite President Clinton's claims that inadequate funding is the reason he is obstructing the annual appropriations process, already he has signed bills that are below last year's levels in outlays and budget authority, and he refuses to sign some that are above last year's levels.

What's The Real Reason for the Obstructionism, Mister President?

Overall spending — with or without the 0.97-percent reduction — is above last year's level. Meanwhile, President Clinton has signed bills that were below last year's levels and refuses to sign bills that were above them. In real terms, overall spending is not an issue and where spending levels could be an issue, it has not affected the President's decision whether to sign or not sign bills. The simple fact is, every cent of non-Social Security money that is available has already been allocated to more spending for the Clinton-Gore Administration. To spend more would mean touching Social Security — and that the Republicans in Congress refuse to do.

The question then becomes: What is the real reason President Clinton is obstructing the appropriations process? Personal pique from his own failure to convince the Senate to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty? A desire to hide the fact that his Administration has not been engaged in the appropriations process until the eleventh hour? A wish to obscure the fact that the budget problem is due to his desire to spend beyond our resources? The sheer love of being in the limelight even in the twilight of his presidency?

Whatever the real reason, it is not due to a spending cut.

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